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ABSTRACT

The pronounced need for community support and involvement in school affairs is evident throughout the nation. This need is especially acute in situations where cultural and economic differences exist between the school and the parents. Study of school boards can locate some of the correlates that articulate and enhance the Indian parents' and the schools' avenues of approach to each other. Increasing emphasis has been placed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and by Indian tribes and other groups toward maximum Indian involvement in all Indian affairs. The BIA has expended extensive efforts in organizing formal school boards and in training board members and school administrators to enhance community involvement. There is a pronounced need to provide analyses of these efforts and to point out direction for future emphasis. If Indian parents are alienated or isolated from the opportunity to be involved in their children's education, factors causing such alienation or isolation need to be pointed out so that corrective policy can be implemented. If meaningful dialogue can be established to reach across geographic, cultural, and economic barriers that may exist between the Indian home and the school, the distance between the learning style of the pupil and the teaching style of the school will be reduced. In this paper, after a review of literature, 6 relevant topics for needed research are listed, and methodological considerations are discussed. (LS)

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RESEARCH NEEDED ON BOARDS OF EDUCATION REPRESENTING AMERICAN INDIAN STUDENTS

A Position Paper
Submitted to
Southwestern Cooperative Educational Laboratory

By
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NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Most Americans maintain that their public schools not only "ought" to be, but <u>are</u>, locally controlled. A locally elected or appointed board of citizens supposedly makes policy representative of its constituency. This policy in turn is executed through a professionally qualified school superintendent.

It may appear to many observers that American Indian parents have had little or no voice concerning the schools their children attended. The Indian child, when he attended school, has attended different types of schools that were apparently sponsored, financed and controlled from various sources which excluded control or counsel of Indian parents.

The validity of both of the above assumptions is doubtful, although some truth in each is obvious. Kerr has found that the superintendent is the main source of influence in the public schools in all but gross matters. (Rosenthal, 1969, p. 169) Iannaccone (1967, p. 99) sees the public school systems increasingly becoming "closed political systems reinforced by the emotional appeal of motherhood, suffering children, and spinster schoolmarms." Fuchs (1969, p. 56) infers that only socially and economically fluent Americans are able to make educational choice for their families. For

the past four decades, and possibly for a greater period of time, every new political administration has claimed that all prior decisions in Indian Affairs have been made for Indians by non-Indian bureaucrats without resort to Indian advice or involvement in the decision-making process; but that the "new" administration will involve Indians in all important decisions. (Quotes from Commissioners Rhoades, 1932; Collier, 1933; McCaskill, 1940; Myers, 1952; Emmons, 1953, 1956; Nash, 1961, in Young, 1961, pp. 582-595)

Charles N. Zellars, former Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs for Education has stated: (1969)

> Historically, Indian parents have had little or no say in the administration of schools their children attended. This has been true both in Federal schools and in public schools attended by Indian children. Rarely was an Indian a member of a school board or even an active participant in parent-teacher groups. The B.I.A. is attempting to encourage more and more participation by the Indian community in the affairs of the school.

Schools for Indian children have existed in one form or another since 1568 when the first Indian school was established by Jesuit missionaries in Havana, Cuba, for Florida Indians. This school was established with the philosophy that boarding schools would facilitate the education of Indian children by alienating them from the language and savagery of their primitive culture. (Roussell, 1962, p. 43) Traces of this philosophy may still be evident in some day and boarding schools serving American Indian

boys and girls, but has rapidly diminished since the advent of the Merriam Report in 1928 (Merriam, 1928).

Bass (1969, p. 2) divides the history of Indian education into three periods. The first was an era of private, mostly church, education. The second was dominated by government education. And he claims that we are now entering into the era of public school education for Indians. At various periods in time, national policy was toward placing prime responsibility on either the church, the government, or the public schools. All of these still maintain substantial responsibility for the education of Indian boys and girls. Of the 152,088 Indian children between the ages of six and eighteen enumerated in 1968, 46,725 were attending federal schools, 87,361 were attending public schools and 8,544 were attending other (mostly church) schools, and 6,616 were not in school. (U.S. Dept. of Interior, 1968, p. 8) By 1968, there were four times as many Navajo students enrolled in college as were enrolled in high school in 1948, and the dropout rate compared favorably with the national rate (Bass, 1969, p. 3). There were 52 Navajos who graduated from high school in 1947-48, as compared with 503 in 1960-61 (Young, 1961, p. 63) and approximately 2,700 graduates in 1969. Church, federal, and public schools have all made substantial contributions to this enormous growth in Navajo education and all are likely to be involved in this endeavor for many years to come.

Varied attempts have been made to obtain parental and community involvement in Indian education. The extent or effects of this involvement has not been determined to any measurable degree, but there is general agreement among public, church and federal school officials that: "Ways should be found today to get Indian community involvement resulting in education of Indians by Indians rather than in education by aliens for Indians." (Bass, 1969, p. 72) In 1969, the New Mexico State Legislature passed a bill enabling public school boards to increase their membership from five to seven members in order to get Indian representation on boards of districts enrolling a substantial number of Indian students. Every school operated by the Navajo Area of the Bureau of Indian Affairs now has an active elected school board. Other Area schools and off-reservation boarding schools are in various stages of developing policy-making or advisory boards. The church schools have various types of advisory boards of appointed Indians and non-Indians.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature and observation of the physical-cultural scene on the Indian Reservations indicates the need to consider the uniqueness of this setting to the rest of the nation in planning and administering the program of Indian education. Although substantial developments have been made in the form of roads and school plant facilities

in the past two decades since Dr. George Sanchez reported his study of Navajo education problems, much remains to be achieved in the areas of community development. His observations and many of his recommendations remain applicable and relevant in any consideration of Indian education, and especially to community involvement in school affairs.

> In planning for education elsewhere in the nation, relatively little thought needs to be given to factors which, in Navajoland, are crucial and decisive ones. Elsewhere, roads are taken for granted. So are community services, public utilities, theatres, water. It is taken for granted that patrons are accessible, physically and culturally, to formal schooling. Topography, terrain, and climate are of minor concern. In the Navajo scene, these and similar factors constitute matters which are of first consideration, for they determine how the schools will function; and if, indeed, they will function. (Sanchez, 1948, p. 52)

Kerr (in Rosenthal, 1969, pp. 136-37) has shown some evidence that little relationship exists between social and economic factors and school board members' behavior, but cites findings (Gross, 1958, pp. 179-181) that educational level of the board members was the only clearly related characteristic to "Educational Progressivism." The educational level, acculturation level and other socio-economic factors are believed to be significantly different between Indian parents and the rest of the nation, but the level of these differences and their effects on school boards to parental behavior in school involvement have not been studied. These conditions need to be examined. Topography, terrain, and climate with attendant unique lack of roads and other

media of communications on Indian Reservations are expected to have significant effect on the findings of such study.

Wood (1969, p. 14) found gross lack of participation by parents in school affairs of a public school district on the Navajo Reservation. He attributed this lack of participation to: (1) ignorance of parents and teachers concerning control of and responsibility for the schools, (2) lack of communication, (3) cultural differences, and (4) lack of acceptance and encouragement of parental participation in school affairs. Erickson's (1969) findings indicated that the widely acclaimed community control of the Rough Rock Demonstration School "would not disturb the customary autonomy of traditional schoolmen." These findings point to the need for developing measures of parental and board participation in and understanding of school affairs. Both of the above studies include elements in the description of the schools that contribute to Halpin's description of a "closed" climate. (Halpin, 1966, p. 131)

The above indicate that the parents have been alienated from participation in their schools. School administrators, teachers, and boards have undoubtedly contributed to this lack of participation. Kerr (Rosenthal, 1969, pp. 165-66) has reported board members' lack of concern for and alienation from the community they vowed to represent. Crain (1969, pp. 122-30) presents an excellent model for the acculturation of the school superintendent that would

obviously resist or alienate parental participation which they may see as "outside interference." Ulibarri (1959) demonstrated lack of awareness by teachers concerning socio-cultural factors in their teaching situation. Zintz (1961, pp. 56-8) showed distinct conflicts in cultural values between the traditional Indian child [and his parents] and his middle-class Anglo teacher. These conflicts in values serve to alienate the culturally different community unless they are understood and respected by the school administration and teachers. Martin (in Rosenthal, 1969, p. 279) portrays a we-they dichotomy of "we [the professional educators] who defend the public schools vs they [the critics, even sympathetic] who seek to destroy it."

Such negativism toward community participation cannot be condoned if schools are to be supported adequately to provide meaningful educational programs in today's rapidly changing world. This is more especially true concerning the culturally different, the deprived American Indian. Schwebel (1968, pp. 241-42) maintains that <u>everyone</u> can be educated if we will make substantial changes in our educational system to reduce, if not entirely eliminate, the strictures placed upon the so-called slow or culturally deprived. He advocates a dramatically broadened concept of the school to include the new community-school idea, which is, in some respects, a very old one in American tradition. He proposes this community school to be "an

institution of the people, run by the people, for the people," and has warned:

> Parents in deprived and disadvantaged groups have long carried especially heavy burdens in trying to achieve good education for their children, as most of them well know. These parents have lately made great progress in voicing their discontent in a few urban areas. More protest, and more constructive action toward change--cooperation with good educators, merciless war against those who are failing the children--is necessary and inevitable.

Inroads of success in achieving community and parental involvement have been reported by Stout (1969) for schools on the Navajo Reservation. In this document, individual reports from thirty-eight schools were made of carefully planned efforts to organize school boards and achieve community participation. The reports indicate many new and unique ideas that were derived from school administrators' attendance at monthly meetings in a workshop situation during the school year 1968-69 with highly specialized consultants and Dr. Stout as director of the workshop. Some time was spent during each session in discussion of community involvement and arriving at some procedures for implementing some of the best ideas resulting from the discussions. Similar workshops are being conducted during the school year 1969-70 with school administrators and school board members participating. Other areas have developed similar programs for organizing and training board members. (Educational Consultant Services, 1968)

PROBLEMS AND NEEDED RESEARCH

The foregoing background generates indications of a need for examining the following problems:

1. What are the different types of boards representing American Indian Students enrolled in Federal, public and private schools?
2. What is the legal status of the various school boards representing Indian students?
3 What are the election or appointment procedures for the different types of boards?
4. What is the educational level, economic status, occupation and level of acculturation of Indian school board members? How do these variables relate to their participation and effectiveness as board members?
5. Does the formal structure of the types of school boards have any relationship to the individual parent's image of the board as an avenue to approach his school system?
6. How do teachers and other school staff members perceive the various types of boards, and what are the reactions of these staff members to the authority and participation of the school boards?

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Indian students attend various types of schools at

several levels of instruction over wide geographic areas. Sampling of schools and boards to be studied will need to include a cross-section of schools within each of the major categories of federal, public, private, or tribally controlled schools. Federal schools should include reservation day schools, reservation boarding schools of various sizes, and off-reservation boarding schools where school boards have been organized. On-reservation and off-reservation public schools should be studied to determine relative degrees of Indian parent and Indian board members' involvement or disengagement. Private schools studied should include samples determined by the size of the school, geographic location and types of governing or advisory boards. The schools operated by tribal corporations such as Rough Rock and Ramah under contract with the Bureau of Indian Affairs could provide a fourth category.

Types of instruments to be considered in examination of school boards could include:

1. Minutes of school board meetings.
2. The public school statutes and regulations of the states in which the schools are located.
3. Questionnaires for school staff members.
4. Personal interviews with school administrators, parents, tribal officials and school board members.
5. Publications and documents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, public and private school systems.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY OF INDIAN SCHOOL BOARDS

The pronounced need for community support and involvement in school affairs is evident throughout the nation. This need is especially acute in situations where cultural and economic differences exist between the school and the parents. Study of school boards can locate some of the correlates that articulate and enhance the Indian parents' and the schools' avenue of approach to one another. Increasing emphasis has been placed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs and by Indian tribes and other groups toward maximum Indian involvement in all Indian affairs. The Bureau of Indian Affairs has expended extensive efforts in organizing formal school boards and to train board members and school administrators to enhance community involvement. There is a pronounced need to provide analyses of these efforts and to point out direction for future emphasis.

If Indian parents are alienated or isolated from the opportunity to be involved in their children's education, factors causing such alienation or isolation need to be pointed out so that corrective policy may be implemented. If meaningful dialogue can be established to reach across geographic, cultural, and economic barriers that may exist between the Indian home and the school, the distance between the learning style of the pupil and the teaching style of the school will be reduced.

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